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# SOUNDING BRASS

By  
EDWARD HALE  
BIERSTADT



STEWART KIDD  
LITTLE THEATRE PLAYS

*Edited by*  
GRACE ADAMS

Stewart Kidd Little Theatre Plays

*Edited by GRACE ADAMS*

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STEWART KIDD LITTLE THEATRE PLAYS

Edited by Grace Adams

SOUNDING BRASS



# SOUNDING BRASS

By  
EDWARD HALE BIERSTADT  
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STEWART KIDD COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

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TO  
STUART WALKER



## FOREWORD

A one-act play enriched by a foreword and notes seems rather like a one-room shack with a porte-cochère and a garage. I have insisted, however, even against the lamentations of the editor, on writing a foreword to this particular play because, having introduced so many plays by other people, I want to know how it feels to introduce a small play of my own. Moreover, *Sounding Brass* has a not uninteresting history.

In 1915, Miss Louise Burleigh and I were working on a long play of prison life, a play since published under the title of *Punishment*, and now out of print. We utilized many of the incidents I had noted in my unofficial association with Thomas Mott Osborne during his remarkable wardenship of Sing Sing, and when the play was finally issued Mr. Osborne wrote an introduction for it, and sent it on its way with his good will.

I am sure that everyone who reads this has written plays; proverbially the disease is as inescapable as the measles. These playwrights, then, will undoubtedly recall how many false starts they have made, how many angles of approach have been considered and rejected, and how often an entire act has been consigned to the waste-paper basket. Probably it has seemed to many of us, however, that after we had chopped a book or a play to pieces and put it together again, that it was a pity that some of the discarded material, good in itself but unfitted to the new

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pattern, should be entirely lost. That, in effect, is the event with *Sounding Brass*. It was once the Prologue to *Punishment*. Now it claims its own place under the spot-light. It is no longer "discarded material."

It is to be doubted whether anyone who reads this has ever read *Punishment*, and still more if, having read it, retains any very coherent recollection of that play. If by chance he does, he will remark that *Sounding Brass* is made up primarily of the "previous action" of the longer play, action which was necessarily relegated to the place of exposition in the final form. Indeed, it would be amusing, and by no means uninstructive, to take the two plays and compare them, marking how interlocked they are, yet how distinct; observing in what manner they overlap and why; and noticing the inevitable plagiarism that this particular utilization gives rise to. If any student of play construction ever takes the trouble to make such a comparison, he has, at least, my blessing. May he find it worth his trouble. . . . Needless to say, *Sounding Brass* has been reconstructed and wholly rewritten, so that now it stands solidly, I hope, as a one-act play.

Originally this play was called *The Fifth Commandment*. Indeed, it had magazine publication under that title. A short time ago, however, it was pointed out to me by one who appeared to be in a position to speak ex cathedra that the commandments are numbered differently in the Protestant and in the Roman Catholic Churches, a matter which had escaped me before. That left the title distressingly ambiguous, and necessitated

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a change. So I fell back in reasonably good order on Sounding Brass, at least firm in the conviction that Tinkling Cymbals would hardly fit the nature of the work.

And now, lest you rise in wrath and say, "Whatever the play is called, the foreword surely should be entitled *Much Ado About Nothing*," let me close this curtain-speech and leave you to the play. Such as it is, it is quite at your disposal. I have at any rate carried out my threat, and have introduced something of my own—a vast satisfaction!

EDWARD HALE BIERSTADT.

New York City,  
May 1, 1922.



## CHARACTERS

MRS. CALVIN,  
JOHN CALVIN, *her husband: Warden of  
Riverside Prison.*  
WALTER, *their son.*  
KING, *the Principal Keeper.*

## NOTE

I am indebted to *The Drama* for permission to republish  
this play which first appeared in its pages under the title of  
*The Fifth Commandment.* E. H. B.



## SOUNDING BRASS

*The living-room of the Warden's quarters in Riverside Prison is a grim room with heavily carved golden-oak pannelling running up to a height of about four feet all around the walls. The walls themselves are painted a peculiarly ghastly color which can only be known as "institutional green." At the back are two large windows crisscrossed by great iron bars. These windows look out into the prison yard. From them may be seen a bit of the cell-block—grey walls, with regular rows of small windows and large ventilators at intervals. There is a dull green carpet on the floor. A fireplace at the right suggests a certain utilitarian comfort, and a reading couch, with a sewing table beside it, rises by contrast to the height of luxury. In the center of the room is a library table with a lamp, a few books, and magazines on it. There is also an armchair at its side. Along the left wall and between the windows at the back are bookcases filled with long rows of official-looking volumes—doubtless reports and the like. A door at the left leads to the outer offices, and double doors on the right lead to the other rooms of the Warden's establishment.*

*Mrs. Calvin, in a soft, grey-toned house frock, is lying on the reading couch. Opposite, and very near to her, Walter faces her on a low stool.*

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*There are books tumbled on the floor about him, and he holds one in his hand. Mrs. Calvin is a tall, dark, slender woman of about forty. She shows an habitual and studied restraint, and under this the occasionally evident fires of a sensitive, passionate temperament.*

*Walter is a slight, fair boy of ten. He is nervous, eager, impulsive; too high-strung, too sensitive, and with a passion which knits all of these at times into a dangerous flame. Walter reads aloud slowly, and his mother watches him, her gaze sometimes diverted by the firelight.*

WALTER (*reading*) "And . . . following . . . at his chariot wheels . . . came many prisoners."

MRS. CALVIN (*her eyes on the fire*)  
Yes, dear.

WALTER  
"These were the captives of war. And first were the strong young men, prisoners. . . ."

(*He pauses.*)

MRS. CALVIN (*smiling at him*)  
Go on, son.

WALTER  
". . . prisoners . . . ." Mother!

MRS. CALVIN  
Well?

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WALTER

Were the prisoners (*he taps the book*) like the ones in Father's prison?

(*Walter has indicated with a gesture the cell-row seen through the windows at the back. At the mention of the prison, Mrs. Calvin, who has been languid, becomes tense. Her lips grow into a pained line, and her eyes no longer rest on the fire.*)

MRS. CALVIN (*in a low voice*)

No.

WALTER (*eagerly*)

What sort of prisoners, Mother?

MRS. CALVIN

Cæsar's captives were the soldiers who had fought against him.

WALTER

Were they bad?

MRS. CALVIN

No, son.

WALTER (*persisting*)

Then why were they prisoners? Father says the prisoners are wicked men. Father says the Law puts them in prison because they are bad. Father says bad people must be punished. (*Mrs. Calvin winces.*) Weren't Cæsar's prisoners wicked, too? Then why did he put them in prison?

MRS. CALVIN

It was his way of making war, dear. Mother doesn't understand these things either. Finish your page, and then lessons are over. We've done well today, haven't we?

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WALTER

I like lessons with you, Mother. (*He reads on.*) ". . . prisoners taken in battle. Then came the old men—of the Council of State. They walked with bowed heads, broken with shame. And last came the women—the wives, the mothers, and maidens . . ." (*He breaks off.*) Mother, there are no ladies in my father's prison.

MRS. CALVIN (*sharply*)

Walter! Don't call it your father's prison!

WALTER (*surprised*)

But it is!

MRS. CALVIN (*tenderly*)

Come here, dear. (*Walter rises and stands within the circle of her arm.*) Father is here as Warden to help the Governor. The Governor wants the prison to be a better place, and Father is trying to make it so.

WALTER (*cannily*)

Don't you want him to, Mother?

MRS. CALVIN

You couldn't understand now, dear, even if I tried to explain, but when you're a grown man I hope you'll know—as I do.

WALTER

Don't you like it here, Mother?

MRS. CALVIN (*glancing about with a smile*)

Not so well as at home; do you?

WALTER (*reflectively*)

I like home better. (*He kisses her, and she smiles, then motions him back to his book.*)

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MRS. CALVIN

Once more! And this time we *do* finish!

WALTER (*reseating himself, and taking up the book*)

“Behind them on elephants . . .” Elephants!  
Oh, Mother!

MRS. CALVIN

Yes?

WALTER (*dropping the book in his excitement*)

The circus is coming! It’s coming this week,  
and all the bunch is going. May I go?

MRS. CALVIN (*slightly troubled*)

The circus?

WALTER

In a tent with three rings—and they have  
twelve elephants! May I go? I’ve *never* seen  
a circus.

MRS. CALVIN

You must ask your father, dear.

WALTER (*disappointed*)

Oh!

MRS. CALVIN (*glancing at the clock*)

Father will be in for dinner. We must finish  
the reading quickly.

WALTER (*resuming his book*)

I do hope Father will let me go to the circus.

MRS. CALVIN

Well, perhaps he will. (*She smiles brightly.*)  
Go on, dear.

(*Before he has found his place, Walter is stopped by the sudden entrance of Calvin, who comes in quickly and goes at once to his wife’s side. Calvin*

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*vin is a big-boned man, though sparely built, with a stern, set face, and black hair turning grey. He is naturally quick, explosive, dynamic, but all this is under the spell of a terrific self-repression which perverts his natural warm-heartedness into a frigid sense of justice and duty. In a word, he is a thorough Scotch Covenanter—a throw-back to a type that found its only heaven in hell.)*

CALVIN (*resting his hand for a second on his wife's shoulder*)

Good evening, Mary. I hope you're better.

MRS. CALVIN

Much better. (*She smiles at Walter.*) Walter has been entertaining me with Cæsar's triumphs. (*There is too much smoothness in her tone: she is very evidently used to standing between them.*) You must read for Father, Walter.

CALVIN

Behindhand with lessons again, Walter?

WALTER

No, sir.

CALVIN

Good. But you mustn't take your mother's strength for things that should be done at school.

WALTER (*startled*)

Oh, do you think it hurts her?

CALVIN

Your mother isn't well.

MRS. CALVIN

It's a pleasure for me, John, as well as for Walter. I could easily . . .

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CALVIN (*shaking his head*)

Even if you were strong, my dear, lessons are not a matter of pleasure. They are a duty. The boy must learn the difference. (*His face sets.*)

MRS. CALVIN (*her eyes closing wearily*)

I suppose so.

CALVIN (*after a moment in which Walter looks from one to the other and makes an involuntary movement toward his mother, speaks in a wholly different tone*)

Could dinner be set back a bit, Mary, say half an hour? I shall have to see the Principal Keeper in a little while, and I don't like prison affairs to interrupt our home life.

MRS. CALVIN

Of course. Son, run and ask Martin to have dinner at seven-thirty. (*Walter slips out. Mrs. Calvin speaks rather shyly to her husband, for she does not often ask for information.*) Nothing the matter in the prison, is there, John?

CALVIN (*gravely*)

A bad fight between cell-mates. That fellow, Moyne. He is a tough specimen. I'm waiting for the P. K. to report to me now.

MRS. CALVIN (*alert*)

Isn't Moyne the man you put in the straight-jacket?

CALVIN ( *nods, and a blue flame begins to show in his eyes which grow almost fanatic*)

Nothing has any effect, solitary confinement—the straight-jacket—starvation—(*Mrs. Calvin winces.*) We'll try the dark-cell now!

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MRS. CALVIN (*disregarding the last sentence*)

But it does have an effect, John. It makes him fight you harder than ever.

CALVIN (*his jaw set squarely*)

The man must be broken.

MRS. CALVIN

Not *broken*, John.

CALVIN

Yes, just that! I wish you'd look at these men without sentimentality, Mary. Until you're able to understand things better, we won't discuss the prison at all.

(*Mrs. Calvin looks down in silence. Calvin speaks in the tone of one who deliberately changes the subject.*)

CALVIN

Did the doctor come, Mary? (*She nods.*)  
What did he say?

MRS. CALVIN

Very encouraging things.

CALVIN

Is your heart all right again?

MRS. CALVIN

Yes.

(*Calvin bends down and kisses her.*)

MRS. CALVIN (*smiling up at him*)

He even said the strychnine wasn't necessary any more. He gave me a new tonic.

CALVIN (*taking up a small phial from the table*)

Is this the new tonic?

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MRS. CALVIN

No, it hasn't come yet. That's the strychnine.

*(Walter comes in and nods to his mother. Calvin holds out the phial which is marked "Poison". It is nearly full.)*

CALVIN

These ought to be put away safely, Mary.

MRS. CALVIN

Yes. Walter, take Mother's pills upstairs, please. Put them in the medicine closet in the bathroom.

WALTER *(taking the bottle and reading the label)*

Do they kill people?

MRS. CALVIN

Yes, if they take too many. Run along, dear.

*(Walter shakes the bottle curiously and starts out.)*

MRS. CALVIN *(calling after him as he disappears)*

On the top shelf, dear.

CALVIN

The boy's been wearing you out.

MRS. CALVIN

John, I wish I could make you understand that he never tires me . . .

CALVIN *(smiling with gentle superiority)*

I understand that you're always overtiring yourself for that husky youngster.

MRS. CALVIN

But, John—Walter isn't husky. He's high-strung, like me.

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CALVIN (*laughs shortly*)

He's a young calf!

MRS. CALVIN

No, he . . . Hush!

(*Walter comes back. He looks from one to the other, and then sits by his mother.*)

CALVIN

I'm glad you're getting on, Walter.

WALTER (*shyly*)

Yes, sir.

CALVIN (*trying to be pleasant*)

Read me a bit.

(*Walter, delighted, takes the book.*)

WALTER

Here's where we left off. . . . "And Cæsar came into the city in a triumphal procession."

CALVIN (*easily—laughing a little*)

Triumphal procession? Do you know what that means?

WALTER (*keenly alive to any real interest in his father*)

Of course! First comes the general in his chariot in his robes of state, drawn by six white horses. Then come the captives, men and maidens. And then the book says, elephants!

CALVIN (*with heavy humor*)

White horses and elephants! Sounds like a circus parade to me.

WALTER (*dropping his book*)

Oh, Father! There is going to be a circus here—this week!

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CALVIN (*his genial manner going at once*)  
A circus?

(*Mrs. Calvin never takes her eyes from them for long. She is alert, uncomfortable, ready to spring into any breach should one occur.*)

WALTER

Yes, and oh, I do want to go, Father! All the bunch is going.

CALVIN

Walter, you know I dislike slang.

WALTER

Yes, sir. The boys are all going, sir.

CALVIN

I don't think I approve.

WALTER

Please, Father!

CALVIN

I don't like teasing, Walter.

WALTER

But, Father . . .

CALVIN (*with cold gentleness*)

Why do you want to go to this circus, Walter?

WALTER

I've never seen one, and it will be such fun!

CALVIN

My son should think of other things than fun.

WALTER

I do! Sure I do, Father.

CALVIN (*correcting him*)

Surely I do.

(*Walter repeats it after him. There is a tense pause.*)

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WALTER (*timidly*)

Please may I go, Father?

CALVIN

I think it would be better for you if you learned at once that we must often give up what we want to do. I have noticed a tendency in you to insist upon what you *want*.

(*Walter looks puzzled.*)

MRS. CALVIN

John, I . . .

CALVIN

Please, Mary. Walter, we won't discuss this any further.

WALTER

Do you mean that I can't go?

CALVIN

Yes.

WALTER

But why?

CALVIN

Because I think best.

WALTER (*very near to tears*)

But all the . . . the boys are going.

CALVIN

You are not.

WALTER (*blazing out suddenly*)

Yes, I am!

(*Mrs. Calvin sits upright at this outburst. Calvin simply stares.*)

WALTER

I will go. I want to go. I told the boys I'd go. You just want to be mean, Father. I will go!

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MRS. CALVIN (*breathing it*)

Walter . . .

CALVIN (*dangerously*)

You will go?

WALTER

Yes, I will. I don't care what you say!

MRS. CALVIN

Walter . . . !

CALVIN

Wait, Mary. You say, Walter, that you will go. The ticket costs money. How do you propose to buy one?

WALTER

I've got some money. I earned it. I can buy a ticket myself.

CALVIN

You earned money? How?

WALTER

Working for Mother.

CALVIN

Working for Mother?

WALTER

Yes, I did, I . . .

(*Mrs. Calvin watches every movement of her husband and son in agony.*)

CALVIN

A son of mine *took money* from his mother when she asked him to help her? Walter, come here. Did you ever see me take payment from your mother for what I do for her? (*Walter shakes his head slowly in negation.*) No, I love your mother.

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*(Walter's eyes go to his mother's painfully, full of yearning. Mrs. Calvin opens her lips to speak, and then closes both eyes and lips with a tremendous effort.)*

CALVIN

Am I to conclude that you do not love your mother? That you must be paid for every service you do her?

MRS. CALVIN

John, don't! . . .

WALTER *(as Calvin puts up his hand, flings himself down by Mrs. Calvin's couch sobbing)*  
Mother, I do love you! I do love you!

*(Mrs. Calvin puts an arm about him. Calvin motions her to be silent.)*

CALVIN

Then, Walter, if you love your mother, prove it. Return her this money. Go. Bring it here.  
*(Walter sobs. Calvin speaks sternly, if only because he is moved.)* Go!

MRS. CALVIN

It was my fault. . . .

WALTER

Oh, Mother, I do love you!

CALVIN

Then bring back the money.

*(Walter goes reluctantly, still sobbing.)*

MRS. CALVIN

I gave him the money, because I felt that he was getting old enough to have an allowance.

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CALVIN

He must not sell his service to you.

MRS. CALVIN

Do let him go to the circus, John. It's such a small thing.

CALVIN

There are no small things. He must learn to sacrifice his wishes. He must give them up for the mere sake of giving them up.

*(Walter comes back slowly. He has stopped crying. Father and son face each other. The same steely look is in the eyes of each.)*

CALVIN

The money?

*(Walter puts in his hand a child's bank. Calvin takes it to his wife.)*

CALVIN

This is yours.

*(Walter's face is crossed by a sharp spasm of pain. Mrs. Calvin is breathing quickly in tortured silence. If Calvin were a lesser man, one might call him smug.)*

CALVIN

Walter, beg your mother's pardon. Tell her that you are sorry.

*(Walter stands speechless.)*

CALVIN

Walter!

WALTER *(his voice very small, his lips trembling)*  
I do.

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MRS. CALVIN

Darling—

CALVIN (*stopping her*)

My son, I hope you understand now that we do not take money from those we love.

(*Walter bends his head listlessly.*)

CALVIN

You will have to prove, in many ways, both to me and to your mother, that you *do* love her.

MRS. CALVIN

No! I can't bear this!

CALVIN

Mary, you must leave this to me. (*To Walter.*) Because after such a thing as you have done, we cannot believe it easily.

MRS. CALVIN

I believe it! I know it.

CALVIN (*eyeing her coldly*)

Do you want me to take Walter where I can speak to him alone?

(*Mrs. Calvin sinks back overcome. The boy is shivering from head to foot.*)

CALVIN (*to Walter*)

Your conduct has been inexcusable this morning. Among other things you have spoken to your father as no decent boy would speak.

WALTER (*crying out under the strain*)

I'm sorry, Father!

CALVIN

Being sorry is the first step. But when we have done wrong we must be punished.

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WALTER (*involuntarily*)

No!

(*Mrs. Calvin moves helplessly.*)

CALVIN

Yes, my son.

MRS. CALVIN (*crying out*)

Come to me, Walter!

(*The boy runs to her, hiding his face in her shoulder. Calvin starts toward them.*)

MRS. CALVIN (*quietly*)

John, you mustn't do this.

CALVIN

I am doing what I think right.

(*Walter clings to his mother, his body shaking, but no sound coming. Calvin walks up and down the room once. Then he goes to the pair who cling together, and, not urgently, takes the boy's arm. The child flinches away. Calvin's lips tighten.*)

MRS. CALVIN

John!

CALVIN (*disregarding her*)

Walter, I must make you remember the next time you are thwarted to control your temper.

WALTER

I'm sorry.

CALVIN

I want you to remember how sorry you are. Go upstairs now. Go into the closet in my room . . . .

WALTER

Father!

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CALVIN

And shut the door. You will stay there in the dark until someone comes to release you.

WALTER

Father, don't make me do that! I'm so afraid of the dark!

CALVIN

Walter! Are you ever going to be a man? You know that you've done wrong. Very well, then: take your medicine!

WALTER (*in a desperate, breaking voice*)

Oh, Mother! You ask him not to!

MRS. CALVIN

John, please . . . I . . .

CALVIN (*to Walter*)

Obey me, Walter!

(Walter suddenly stiffens, looks his father straight in the eyes with an unchildish, inscrutable expression, and goes out in silence.)

MRS. CALVIN

John! Don't do this thing. Don't! I was afraid of the dark when I was little. I know! He will be ill . . . He's just a child . . . a baby . . .

CALVIN

He is old enough not to be afraid of darkness.

MRS. CALVIN (*wildly*)

It's torture! You're going to torture your own son!

CALVIN

You're full of sick fancies, Mary. Control yourself. The boy's no weakling. He's just a young

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animal that must be subdued. He must learn self-control, and he shall!

MRS. CALVIN

Your method with him is all wrong. It is! It is! He is far more nervous than he was a year ago. He's grown so thin . . . Can't you see, John? It's like putting him in the dark-cell. Your own son! Oh, I'm afraid for him! I'm afraid!

CALVIN (*coldly looking at his watch*)

Since your own nerves are in such a state, my poor Mary, you may release him for dinner. That will be in fifteen minutes. But mind! Leave him alone until then. I will not have my authority undermined.

MRS. CALVIN (*in a dead voice*)

Very well.

(She starts to leave the room. There is a knock on the door leading to the office.)

CALVIN

Come in. (To Mrs. Calvin.) Try to rest and calm yourself before dinner, my dear.

(He opens the door on the right and she goes out silently. Meanwhile King, the Principal Keeper, has entered at the other door and stands waiting, his cap in his hand. King is a lanky man of medium height, and is possessed of a pair of tricky, light blue eyes. He has sandy grey hair, and wears the dark blue uniform of a keeper.)

CALVIN (*turning to King*)

Well, Mr. King, I've been waiting to hear from you. You have to report?

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KING (*stolidly*)

The men in the cell-block who were fighting have been locked in their own cell, sir. We must send 'em to the cooler at once. I don't trust 'em together for long.

CALVIN

Quite right. The men are Moyne and . . . ?

KING

Wilson. Moyne's pretty bad off, sir.

CALVIN

Hurt?

KING

No, sick. Fever or something. He was to have gone to the hospital today.

CALVIN (*sternly*)

He was not too sick to break the rules of this prison. He cannot escape punishment on that plea. He will go to the dark-cells for one week.

KING

Yes, sir.

CALVIN

They'll make out a commitment order in my office. Just get it now, and I'll sign it at once. I want to get to my dinner.

KING

Very well, sir.

*(He goes out into the office. As he closes the door behind him, another door upstairs bangs sharply and suddenly, so that Calvin's attention is arrested. Overhead there is the sound of quick running to and fro. Calvin listens intently. A woman's voice cries out terribly. Calvin moves toward the door uncertainly. More footsteps, then—silence.)*

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*All at once Mrs. Calvin appears in the doorway. She is very white and very quiet. Her breath comes quickly, and her eyes are staring.)*

CALVIN (*sharply*)

What is it?

MRS. CALVIN

Your son . . .

CALVIN

Is he hurt?

MRS. CALVIN (*slowly*)

He . . . is . . . (*She breaks off with a sharp cry, and holds up the now empty phial in which were the strychnine pills.*)

CALVIN (*aghast*)

The strychnine? Not . . . (*His voice rises fantastically.*) God! It's empty!

MRS. CALVIN (*tearless and quiet*)

Empty.

CALVIN (*still in that high-pitched tone of horror*)

The boy?

MRS. CALVIN (*between quick breaths, her face expressionless*)

He is dead. . . . Your son is dead.

CALVIN (*in a choking whisper, still staring at the bottle stupidly*)

Dead . . .

MRS. CALVIN (*mechanically*)

Go up and see . . .

CALVIN (*his mouth too dry to articulate*)

Doctor—

MRS. CALVIN (*monotonously*)

He was all alone . . . all alone in the dark.

. . . He was afraid . . . of the dark.

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. . . Do you remember that he was afraid of the dark? (She takes her eyes from him, and stares down at the phial in her hand.)

(Calvin pulls at his collar, wets his lips, and moves his head stiffly from side to side in a dazed way. Mrs. Calvin stands in frozen silence. There is a knock at the door leading from the office. Neither of them hears it. Another, louder knock. King opens the door and enters. He looks from the Warden to his wife in alarm at their appearance. Not knowing what to do he holds out the paper he has in his hand to Calvin.)

KING (with nervous embarrassment)

The commitment, sir—to send Moyne to the dark-cells.

CALVIN (who has not seemed to notice King's presence before, at these words lifts his head with a great cry)

The dark-cells! . . . The dark . . . !

(He grasps at the air, then crashes headlong. King runs to him. Mrs. Calvin stands still, staring at the phial in her hand.)

CURTAIN

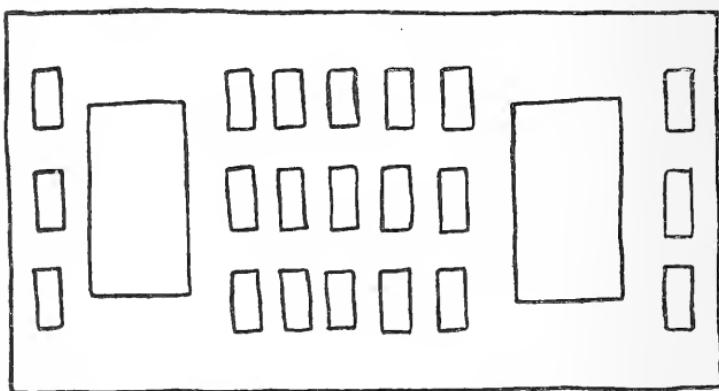
## PRODUCTION NOTES

It is not in the least my desire to seem to force my point of view on the possible producers of *Sounding Brass*. On the other hand I have found in Little Theatres, and even in Larger Theatres, that on occasion the author *can* make useful suggestions. For this reason then, if for no other, I append the following notes.

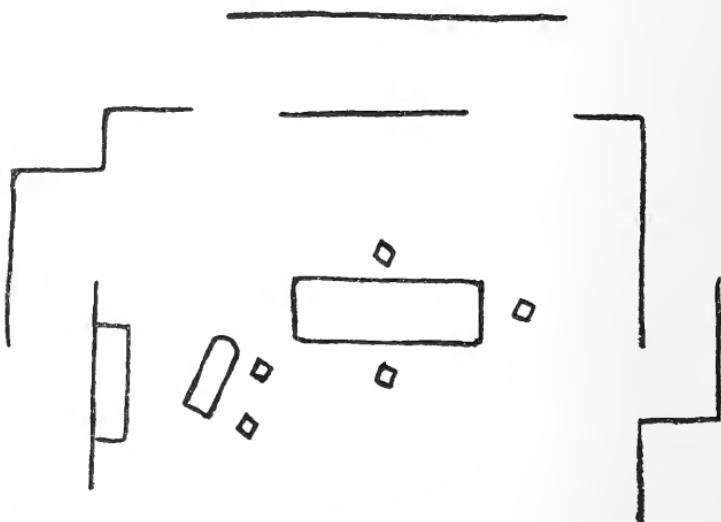
The prison walls are of grey stone, old and stained. The large windows are for ventilation, and open into the corridors. They are heavily barred, the bars being thicker than those used at the cell windows. Over the entire window is a heavy wire screen. The cell windows are about three times as high as they are wide, and they are about four feet in height. They are well barred. The casements on all the windows are very deep and sloping.

Needless to say this sketch is not drawn to scale. It aims to give merely the rough actual outlines. The bars and screen are not drawn in. The grey stone blocks that make the prison wall are about two feet by three feet. Details are unimportant: the impression conveyed by the whole is the essential thing.

The room has been, and in most respects still is, primarily institutional. The walls are painted that ghastly shade, an "institutional green," and little effort has been made to relieve them with pictures or decorations of any kind. On the floor



BACK-DROP SHOWING CELL-BLOCK



SCENE PLOT

## SOUNDING BRASS

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is a dark carpet unbrightened by rugs. At the back are two large windows looking out over the prison yard, and across to the cell-block. On the Right is the entrance to the other rooms in the Warden's quarters. A heavy, dark-green, plush portière covers this. Outside this door are stairs, but it is not necessary to show them. On the Left is the entrance to the prison office. Down Right is a good-sized fireplace with a built-in grate. There is a reading couch near it. There is a small sewing table near this couch, as well as a small chair or stool. A large library table, Center. It is of dark wood, and on it is a reading lamp which lights most of the room. There are overhead lights which are seldom used. The room is full of shadows. The woodwork is composed of heavy golden oak pannelling running up to about four feet all round the walls. It appears to be heavily carved. Books and the usual paraphernalia are on the great table. The room was intended to be costly by the contractor who made it a half-century ago, and it is. It is cold, menacing, and in painfully bad taste.

### CHARACTERIZATION NOTES

#### MRS. CALVIN—

She is a sensitive, passionate woman repressed by an uncongenial marriage and the ill health which it has brought upon her. Where she expected to find strength and firmness, she has encountered only ethical fanaticism and ruthless obstinacy. To protect her son from these traits in her husband until Walter has become

## SOUNDING BRASS

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able to protect himself is now the sole aim of her life. The fact that she cannot protect him more effectually is slowly consuming her. She is despairing, never hysterical. But she is afraid to defy Calvin outright, as experience has taught her that such a course on her part only drives him into harsher severity towards Walter.

CALVIN—

He is of Scotch blood of the stern, self-denying, self-flaying type, and like most of his temperament, he not only exacts this of himself, but insists upon it in others. He does not like to feel that he is suffering alone, and to him "goodness" and pain are one. Two generations back, on his native soil, he would have said candidly that he acted as he did to save his soul. Now, however, he has substituted ethics for religion. He suffers from anachronism of conscience.

KING—

An old-fashioned policeman in authority.

WALTER—

The boy is high-strung and sensitive; all his mother except for a latent, flinty determination which underlies the gentleness of his nature and which he inherits from his father. The struggle of his parents over him is only too apparent to him. His mother seeks to rule him by love, his father by the harsh use of authority. In this last conflict between them he realizes suddenly that in the last analysis his mother has no real power to protect him against the terror and injustice of his father's rule, and that she will

## SOUNDING BRASS

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never have this power. To a child a year seems an eternity, and Walter feels that he has many years of such terror and suffering to face. Keyed to the utmost pitch of revolt by the accusations of his father and his congenital horror of the dark, he chooses death rather than the life he sees before him.

### COSTUME PLOT

**MRS. CALVIN**—

Dark dress relieved only by a touch of white at the throat and wrists. The dress should be of rather soft, clinging material so that it will tend to accentuate the long lines of her figure.

**CALVIN**—

Sack suit, probably a grey mixture, well-made and of good stuff. Dark four-in-hand tie, and black shoes. He is well-dressed because he is well-bred, but he has not at all the appearance of one who considers his clothes.

**KING**—

Dark blue uniform, not of military cut, but more like those worn by train conductors, with a single-breasted lapel coat with brass buttons. Black bow tie, and black shoes. Stiff military cap with blue visor.

**WALTER**—

Tweed knickerbocker suit. Soft color. Flowing tie. Black shoes and stockings.

### NOTES ON ACTING

The play begins in an easy measure, and rises sharply to its climax. The entrance of Calvin—

## SOUNDING BRASS

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the bank incident—Walter's final exit—and Mrs. Calvin's final entrance all mark changes in tempo. In the last scene Mrs. Calvin is numb and still in contrast to Calvin, who has entirely lost his balance and is nearly mad in consequence. They both appear as the direct opposite of what they have been, outwardly, before. Walter goes through three phases—up to his father's refusal—from there to the return of the money—and from that on.—E. H. B.

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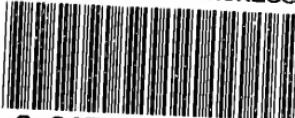
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